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Sen. Van Woerkom secures money for Muskegon County program that keeps kids out of court system

LANSING – A Muskegon County program that helps children avoid re-entering the court system would receive \$230,000 because of the work of Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom, R-Norton Shores.

Van Woerkom secured the money in the state's Department of Human Services budget that cleared the Senate on Tuesday. The program helps Muskegon County kids who were in the juvenile justice system move back into the community.

"This important program has helped dozens of Muskegon County children break the cycle of crime and allowed them to return to their families," Van Woerkom said. "The dollars spent now will save dollars in the future and help prevent the child from ending up in jail as an adult. We're addressing problems early while a child can be reached."

The two-year-old pilot Muskegon County Juvenile Re-entry Program offers drug testing, mental-health treatment and parenting skills. It aims to keep kids from being arrested again and put back into the court system. The program saves the county money because housing a child in a juvenile facility typically costs \$400 a day, while the cost of the program runs \$150 a day per child. In two years, the county expects to save enough money that the state money won't be needed.

Patricia Steele, the administrator for the 14th Circuit Court, which serves Muskegon County, praised Van Woerkom for ensuring the money for the program was included in the budget.

"We are fortunate to have in Senator Van Woerkom someone who understands the needs of all of Muskegon County's families, especially those with children in need of the court's attention and assistance," Steele said. "We can't continue to do business as usual and expect different results. We will use these funds to secure a better future for these families and our community."

The House of Representatives is considering the budget.

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